College Admissions

75 New England Institutions of Higher Education State that Proficiency-Based Diplomas Do Not Disadvantage Applicants

Over the past decade, the movement to adopt proficiency-based approaches to teaching, learning, and graduating has gained momentum throughout New England and the country, as more educators, parents, employers, and elected officials recognize that high educational standards and strong academic preparation are essential to success in today’s world. With some parents wondering what potential impact proficiency-based education may have on their children or the college-admissions process, the New England Secondary School Consortium reached out to institutions of higher education throughout the region. We asked them about their support of proficiency-based learning and how non-traditional grading systems and transcripts might affect the admissions process. Throughout this process, the Consortium has worked closely with the New England Board of Higher Education, which published a white paper in the New England Journal of Higher Education summarizing insights from a conversation on the topic with admissions leaders from highly selective colleges and universities in the region. During our many conversations, the following themes emerged:

1. Admissions offices receive a huge variety of transcripts, including transcripts from international schools, home-schooled students, and a wide variety of alternative educational institutions and programs that do not have traditional academic programs, grading practices, or transcripts.
2. Students with non-traditional transcripts—including “proficiency-based” or “competency-based” transcripts—will not be disadvantaged in any way during the admissions process. Colleges and universities simply do not discriminate against students based on the academic program and policies of the sending school, as long as those program and policies are accurately presented and clearly described.
3. As long as the school profile is comprehensive and understandable, and it clearly explains the rigor of the academic program, the technicalities of the school’s assessment and grading system, and the characteristics of the graduating class, the admissions office will be able to understand the transcript and properly evaluate the strength of a student’s academic record and accomplishments. In short, schools use so many different systems
for grading, ranking, and tracking students that a school’s system can only be properly understood when a transcript is accompanied by a comprehensive school profile. A class rank or GPA, for example, doesn’t mean much unless the admissions office also has the “key” (i.e., the school profile) that it needs to understand the applicant’s academic accomplishments and abilities in context.

4. All the colleges and universities we spoke with strongly support public schools that are working to improve student preparation for postsecondary learning and success, including instructional strategies that equip students with the essential knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits they need to thrive and persist in a collegiate academic program and earn a degree.

In response to our questions, the following 75 public and private institutions of higher education from across New England also provided statements and letters stating—unequivocally—that students with proficiency-based grades and transcripts will not be disadvantaged in any way. Each statement is available for download:
Connecticut

1. Asnuntuck Community College
2. Capital Community College
3. Central Connecticut State University
4. Charter Oak State College
5. Connecticut College
6. Connecticut State Colleges and Universities
7. Eastern Connecticut State University
8. Gateway Community College
9. Housatonic Community College
10. Manchester Community College
11. Middlesex Community College
12. Naugatuck Valley Community College
13. Northwestern Connecticut Community College
14. Norwalk Community College
15. Quinebag Valley Community College
16. Southern Connecticut State University
17. Three Rivers Community College
18. Trinity College
19. Tunxis Community College
20. University of Connecticut
21. Western Connecticut State University

Maine

1. Bates College
2. Bowdoin College
3. Central Maine Community College
4. Eastern Maine Community College
5. Husson University
6. Kennebec Valley Community College
7. Maine Community College System
8. Northern Maine Community College
9. Southern Maine Community College
10. Thomas College
11. Unity College
12. University of Maine
13. University of Maine at Augusta
14. University of Maine at Farmington
15. University of Maine at Fort Kent
16. University of Maine at Machias
17. University of Maine at Presque Isle
18. University of Maine System
19. University of Southern Maine
20. Washington County Community College
21. York County Community College
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<tr>
<th>Massachusetts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Amherst College</td>
<td>1. Antioch University New England</td>
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<td>2. Babson College</td>
<td>2. Community College</td>
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<td>3. Harvard University</td>
<td>System of New Hampshire</td>
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<td>4. Massachusetts Institute of Technology</td>
<td>3. Dartmouth College</td>
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<td>5. Tufts University</td>
<td>4. Granite State College</td>
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<td>6. Wellesley College</td>
<td>5. Great Bay Community College</td>
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<td>7. Williams College</td>
<td>6. Keene State College</td>
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<td>7. Lakes Region Community College</td>
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<td>8. Manchester Community College</td>
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<td>9. Nashua Community College</td>
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<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>10. NHTI-Concord’s Community College</td>
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<td>1. Community College of Rhode Island</td>
<td>11. Plymouth State University</td>
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<td>2. Rhode Island College</td>
<td>12. River Valley Community College</td>
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<td>15. White Mountains Community College</td>
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Vermont

1. Castleton State College
2. Community College of Vermont
3. Johnson State College
4. Lyndon State College
5. Middlebury College
6. University of Vermont
7. Vermont State Colleges
8. Vermont Technical College